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ABSTRACT

Continuing education programs in library and information science need to be coordinated, regularized, and modularized for increased efficiency, economy, and effectiveness. Institutes, workshops, and seminars are more attractive to participants and easier to organize if they are presented in a topical series or module. Reimbursement of expert contributors and intelligent re-use of good programs improves the quality of a series. A sponsor who takes care of secretarial and publicity support increases the efficiency of a program, as shown by the successful Simmons Library School Alumni Office sponsorship of continuing education programs in New England. Further coordination and long-range planning by professional groups is needed to define and meet professional education needs. (Author/PF)

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SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

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SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

Having served as the director of three continuing education projects in library/information science at Simmons College, I should like to discuss some of my first-hand experience with them and then generalize from this to factors that need to be considered in developing continuing education programs.

I directed an Advanced Institute on Budgeting and Accountability at Simmons College for which registrations were so heavy that two sessions were held on successive weekends. It was sponsored by the Simmons Alumni Office. A Workshop on Cost Reduction in Technical Services, held at the Boston Public Library's new Annex and attended by 93 persons, was sponsored by the New England Technical Services Librarians, a regional professional association. A Seminar on Library Systems Analysis at Brandeis University, which was attended by 96 persons, was sponsored by the New England Chapter of the Special Libraries Association. Since all three programs were budgeted for break-even with sixty participants, all turned a modest profit; this profit could have been used as seed money for successive continuing education projects. In addition, these three activities broke new ground in New England--for the first time the experts who contributed to the programs were reimbursed. While individuals are often willing to make contributions to the advancement of the profession, it is not unreasonable, because of the number

of hours involved in preparing for a successful institute or workshop or seminar, to pay individuals for their efforts. I believe there would be more continuing education programs if this practice of paying participants for their services were more widely adopted.

As an outgrowth of my involvement in these local programs, I have been exploring ways in which the planning and preparation of continuing education programs can be simplified. I am of the opinion that such programs can be coordinated, regularized, or modularized for greater efficiency, economy, and effectiveness.

My first conviction is that the offering of continuing education programs in series, with a single registration covering a number of related sessions (the group of sessions might be referred to as a module) would economize on time and money needed for planning, publicity, and registration. The series, or module, should be of sufficient magnitude so that those who complete the module will have measurably increased competence for service to the profession.

An example of such a module is a series of four sessions in the area of Administration and Management, covering Public Relations, Budgeting (including Grantsmanship), Staff Development and Training, and Work Simplification. This we have considered presenting as a Simmons Alumni Office continuing education activity. We have also considered a module in the area of Media, one of which, on Slides, has already been presented

with great success. Another series on Current Awareness would deal with such topics as Real Costs of Participation in Networks; Techniques of Searching Large Scale On-Line Data Bases; Automated Inter-Library Loans, and On-Line Union Catalogs. Another module is on the Development of Professional Skills, covering such topics as the Utilization of Government Documents, Non-Print Media Use, In-Service Training Programs, and Special Subject Librarianship (Medical, Map, Legal, etc.)

These series of sessions, if offered, would be independent of the academic calendar, would be presented in different places, and at times convenient for individuals who are employed full-time. Ideally, institutions should provide released time to their employees and money for participation in these continuing education modules. A step that might increase the number of instances in which employees are permitted to take part in continuing education activities during their regular working day would involve the presentation of certificates to all successful participants. Individuals who engage in continuing education activities should receive tangible rewards--promotions or pay increases. Since documentary evidence of participation in a module may be of use in contract negotiations with employers, we would supply such evidence. We also believe that a somewhat larger and more formal pattern for the conducting of continuing education modules might increase employer recognition and acknowledgement of the value of such education.

At the present time, almost every continuing education effort seems to begin from ground zero in the selection of sponsor, date, place, topic, director, experts, mode of presentation, publicity, budget, audience, and means of evaluation. Unless the profession is willing to regularize some aspects of continuing education, the ground zero problem will slow the successful developmeht of continuing education activities.

Choosing of a sponsor usually involves attention to their ability to provide mailing lists, secretarial staff, banking facilities, telephone service, and a convenient mailing address, as well as seed funds to defray publicity and registration expenses, or to cover such expenses until registration fees have been collected. State agencies may have continuing education funds, secretarial pools, and mailing lists of potential enrollees, but few such agencies possess all of these essentials. National agencies ma be useful for such services as peripatetic MARC Institutes and for general guidance, but they are not usually effective for implementing local programs. Local or regional branches of professional associations, although lacking continuity of administration, often have good mailing lists. They, unfortunately, often lack secretarial staff and money. Library schools, or library school alumni associations, although not dispersed geographically in the most desirable pattern and although they may not have funds budgeted for continuing education, do have mailing lists,

secretarial staff, banking facilities, telephone service, etc. Of course, to reach all potential participants in a continuing education activity, library schools or alumni associations would need to supplement their lists with mailing lists from local or regional professional associations. Since continuity of sponsorship is necessary to escape some aspects of the ground zero problem, the sponsor should be willing to make a reasonably long-range commitment.

In New England, we found that the Simmons Library School Alumni Office offered both continuity and a good array of required services; and that local professional groups proved not quite as effective as sponsors. In all cases, initiatives regarding dates, topics, director, experts, and publicity were left to a continuing education team. One major question with which I am concerned is: "Who holds or should have decision-making authority for continuing education efforts?" Many projects are launched because of the enthusiasm of one individual or of a small and determined group. No long-range, regularized local professional commitment to a level of continuing education activity that will produce measurable improvement in the performance of practitioners in the field of library/information science presently exists--at least not in New England.

Most local institutes, workshops, seminars, short courses, or tutorials are on-shot activities. Experts are recruited, discuss goals and objectives of a single continuing education program, schedule components of the program, engage in extensive

individual preparation, assemble materials for distribution to participants, devise media support for the program--all for a single session, usually for an audience of fewer than 100 individuals. The next continuing education program begins again from ground zero. One soon runs out of experts--how many speakers are there that others will pay to hear?

The budget is usually developed without the benefit of prior budgets or fiscal reports and with only an educated guess as to the potential enrollment and how much social activity is desired. Evaluation sheets, which may be distributed during the meeting and collected at the end of the session (if a reasonably good percentage of response is desired) or may be mailed for later return (if a small response is deemed adequate) often prove of little practical use because only rarely are the same individuals involved in the planning and presentation of the next continuing education effort.

Before we decide that more continuing education activities are necessary, we should explore the question of whether or not current continuing education efforts are, in fact, "grossly inadequate to meet practitioner needs," as some observers contend. While Canadian library schools and UCLA have chosen to go to two-year programs in library science, most library schools continue to offer one-year graduate programs. We need to consider such questions as: Who needs education beyond one year of graduate study? What is the size of the market for con-

tinuing education programs? Will practitioners participate in a substantially higher frequency of continuing education programs? My opinion is that, while some practitioners may be pleased with a somewhat more regularized, coordinated series of continuing education programs, most are unlikely to participate in such programs at a higher frequency rate than presently offered.

However, at whatever rate of presentation, I hope we can move toward conservation of experts and intelligent re-use of good programs, perhaps by putting them on the road by means of teams or media presentations. I also hope we can devise means for more efficient sponsorship, planning, publicity, and registration for these programs. I know that continuing education programs can be readily self-supporting. Perhaps what we most need is a better procedure for decision-making about continuing education offerings. It may be found that continuing education is a limited response to a limited need with limited potential for beneficial impact on the profession. The most promising practitioners will probably choose regularized routes--formal advanced degree programs--fur further professional development, while less ambitious practitioners will be content with occasional continuing education programs. We may need, therefore, not an increased frequency of continuing education offerings, but an increased substance to each continuing education program that is presented.